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ANNOUNCEMENTS.—The Chairman announced to the meeting two very important geographical facts, which would probably be the subjects of future papers read before the Society. 1st. A letter from Sir Henry Barkly, Governor of Victoria, stating that Messrs. Burke and Wills had crossed the Australian Continent to the Gulf of Carpentaria, and returned to Cooper's Creek, where they had miserably perished from starvation (see pp. 53 and 68). 2ndly. That a letter had been received from Mr. Thornton, who accompanied Baron von der Decken, stating that they had returned to Mombas, after reaching and partly ascending Kilimanjaro; whose top was covered with snow, and whose height was trigonometrically measured to be about 20,000 feet (see p. 47).

The Papers read were—

1. *Brief Narrative of an Expedition to the Andaman Islands, in 1857.*
By F. J. MOUAT, M.D., of the Bengal Army, F.R.G.S., &c.

A COMMISSION was appointed by the Governor-General of India, in 1857, to examine the Andaman Islands, with a view of selecting a suitable spot for a penal settlement. The mutineers of the great Indian Rebellion were to be sent there, and the islands were ultimately to form a station for the reception of all felons who were sentenced to transportation from India. Dr. Mouat was appointed the chief of the commission; his associates were Dr. George Playfair, to whom the medical and scientific duties were assigned, and Lieut. Heathcote, who undertook the hydrography.

Very little recent intelligence was procurable about these islands, though part of their coasts had been carefully surveyed by Lieut. Blair, in 1789, and a penal settlement had actually been established upon them at the same date, but abandoned, in 1795, on account of its unhealthiness. Col. Colebrook, afterwards Surveyor-General of India, had visited the Andamans, and published a short vocabulary of the language of the natives. Others also had published short accounts in the beginning of this century; but of late years no information whatever had been obtained about the Andamans, except through the narratives of shipwrecked persons, who invariably represented the aborigines as exceedingly savage and hostile. Dr. Helps endeavoured to explore the islands in 1840, but he was murdered shortly after his arrival. The Andamaners were usually reputed cannibals.

Dr. Mouat's commission was accompanied by a large escort, including a useful body of Burmese convicts sent to aid them in pioneering. They sailed to their destination in a steamer of light draught, and ultimately proceeded in making a thorough examina-

tion of the coasts of the Andamans, except where the abundance of coral reefs made safe navigation and useful harbours an impossibility. The natives were found to be exceedingly numerous and hostile, and their stealthy habits made it necessary for the exploring party to proceed with exceeding vigilance; especially as the island was covered by a dense vegetation, which seriously embarrassed the movements of the travellers, and hid the advances of the natives. The entire islands, up to the very hill tops, which reached 2000 feet in altitude, were clothed by a forest-growth of such remarkable thickness that no eminence could be climbed without cutting a pathway. No spots were found sufficiently open to admit of safe encampment, and, in consequence, the party were obliged to return every night to their ships, and to content themselves with a limited range of exploration from the coast.

Several good harbours were found. Port Cornwallis, the site of the old settlement, is a magnificent one: it is land-locked and picturesque; but a bank of mud, uncovered at low-water, was there to account for its unhealthiness.

The botanical features of the Andaman Islands somewhat resemble those of Sumatra: fine timber-trees were found in the forest. As regards animals, the only mammal seen was a small black hog of a peculiar species. Rats and monkeys were said to exist. A harmless green snake was the only discovered reptile. Scorpions and centipedes were found in abundance. Birds were neither numerous nor varied in species.

Numerous efforts were made to communicate in a friendly way with the natives, but all failed utterly. The Sepoys who have latterly escaped from the penal settlement into the bush—for the station has been established since Dr. Mouat's visit—have been equally unsuccessful: they have usually been murdered, and those who returned can hardly account for their good fortune in being permitted to do so. One intelligent Hindoo informant, who lived upwards of a year among the natives, brought back a full and very interesting account of their social habits. He agrees with others in his description of their habitual hatred and ferocity to strangers, but adds that, to one another, they were kindly disposed. He wholly repudiates the charge of cannibalism brought against them. In the many huts Dr. Mouat examined, which had just before been quitted by their inhabitants, he could find no traces whatever of such a practice. Yet they have customs which seem sufficient to have suggested this charge; they prize the bones of their deceased relatives, and, as they are remarkably migratory, they always carry the bones with them. The dead are buried in a sitting posture; and, months after-

wards, the bones are exhumed, wept over, and divided amongst the relatives. The chief mourner wears the skull, hung from his neck, upon his back, and carries it for more than a year.

A native was captured during an attack upon Dr. Mouat's expedition, and was brought by him to Calcutta. Though exceedingly ferocious at the time of his capture, it was remarkable how completely and quickly his ferocity left him. He became attached to the sailors, and they to him. He showed himself remarkably docile and imitative, and adopted dress and civilised habits with readiness and constancy.

Dr. Mouat considers the whole of the Andaman group to be inhabited by one single race of men. They are diminutive, but perfectly shaped; they bear no discoverable resemblance to any other race of men. He estimates their number, partly from facts adduced by the Indian Sepoys above mentioned, and corroborated by what he saw, as perhaps attaining to 15,000.

2. *On the Trade between the Eastern Archipelago and New Guinea and its Islands.* By A. RUSSELL WALLACE, F.R.G.S.

THE portion of New Guinea with which trade is regularly maintained from the Eastern Archipelago, includes Geelvink Bay and the north-western part of the island, on both coasts, as far as the 137th degree of longitude. It also includes the adjacent islands of Jobie, Waigaiou, &c., and the more distant ones of Ké and Aru. The entrepot, whence the trade is directly carried on, is a small island, called Kilwaru, scarcely 50 yards across, between Ceram Laut and Keffing, which has a good anchorage on both sides of it.

The only articles of commercial value procured from the interior of New Guinea, are Mussoi bark—which gives an aromatic oil used in Java to rub over the skin—and wild nutmegs. From the coasts and islands come bêche-de-mer, mother-of-pearl, and tortoiseshell, in abundance. There are also pearls, birds of paradise, sago, raw and in cakes, and rice in the husk. Few of these articles go to Europe. The Chinese are the only consumers of bêche-de-mer; the Philippine Islands take the tortoiseshells, and even the pearls and birds of paradise mostly go to China. The goods with which they are all bought, are bar-iron, calico, cheap German knives, &c., and the trade is mainly carried on in native prahus.

Of all this New Guinea district the Aru Islands are the most important. There is a great competition of trade in them; and calicos and handkerchiefs may be obtained even cheaper there than